

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
Basic Officer Course
The Basic School
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5019

B0376

MOVEMENT TO CONTACT**Student Handout**

1. **Introduction.** Up to this time at The Basic School, you have been dealing with a known enemy situation. Someone has maintained contact with the enemy and provided you with detailed information on his location, size, and disposition. Unfortunately, war is not this simple and precise. Even though your unit intelligence officer is well trained and hard working, he does not possess a crystal ball. As a result, the picture he gives you of the battlefield will be incomplete and sometimes inaccurate. Even if the information is accurate, it may not be timely and the situation could have changed since the information was collected.

The end result is that you may move forward into battle unsure of where you will contact the enemy. This undoubtedly will cause you some concern as to how best to employ your assets. Additionally, you will want to quickly push through or bypass the enemy's security elements in order to come to grips with his main body. The problem is to try and use the minimum amount of combat power to locate the enemy main body while leaving the bulk of your combat power free to maneuver. This process sounds easier to execute than it is.

2. **Purpose.** The purpose of this handout is to help you to understand and better prepare you to operate in an uncertain environment in which you will conduct a movement to contact. This handout will discuss the tactics available to you and techniques to use in a movement to contact.

3. **Movement to Contact.** Before we discuss how to do a movement to contact, let's first define what it is. JCS Pub 1-02 defines a movement to contact as an offensive operation designed to gain or re-establish contact with the enemy. In NATO, this operation is called Advance to Contact. However, movement to contact is the term used in Marine Corps publications.

Movement to contact ends when ground enemy resistance requires the deployment and coordinated effort of your main body or its occupation of an assembly area or attack position in order to prepare for a deliberate attack.

The commander must weigh the need to move forward rapidly in order to come to grips with the enemy and the need to keep the main body protected until it is time to deploy against and attack the enemy. To provide for an appropriate mix between speed and security, the commander must choose a formation and task organization to meet the situation based on METT-T.

a. **Organization and formation criteria.** The unit commander conducting the movement to contact considers the below criteria when selecting a formation and organizing his unit.

- (1) Speed
- (2) Security
- (3) Control
- (4) Deployability

All of these considerations are important, but some are more relevant in certain situations. Based on the commander's expectation of contact with the enemy, he organizes his unit for rapid movement, all around security, or a combination of the above. The bottom line is that the commander organizes his unit based on his initial estimation of the situation and changes his organization as the situation changes.

b. **Expectation of contact.** To assist the commander in selecting the best organization of his forces, the Marine Corps breaks expectation of enemy contact into three levels.

- (1) Remote
- (2) Possible
- (3) Imminent

c. Contact remote. The category in which the commander places his expectation of contact will greatly influence how he organizes for movement. When the unit commander feels that the chance of enemy contact is remote, he usually uses a route column. Generally, a commander judges the chance of enemy contact to be remote when there is a friendly unit between him and the enemy to provide security and the greatest threat is from aircraft and long range artillery. The unit commander utilizes the route column to maximize speed and control. Control is also facilitated by grouping subordinate units administratively. Routes are selected that facilitate speed and reduce friction. This formation may also be referred to as an administrative column, and is the same as the one you use on your conditioning hikes.

As the unit closes with the enemy and no longer has other units providing security, the commander must update his estimation of the situation. He may update the expectation of enemy contact to possible. Before we can discuss how this will change the organization of units and the formations, we must first discuss a terminology problem.

d. Contact possible (may also be referred to as "improbable;" these two terms are interchangeable). Once the commander has decided that contact is possible, he must change the tactical organization of his unit. He now shifts the need for speed and control to his need for security and the ability to deploy quickly. The commander task organizes the unit to facilitate the adoption of combat formations. The overall formation is the tactical column, units within the formation may be deployed in another tactical formation based upon their mission, i.e., point element in a "V." The formation usually adopted is the Tactical Column.

Since there is now a threat from enemy ground activity, the commander deploys security elements to protect the main body. These security elements are called guards and are deployed to the front, flank, and rear. JCS Publication 1-02 defines a guard as a unit used to protect the main force from attack, direct fire, and ground observation by fighting to gain time while observing and reporting.

A guard should possess sufficient combat power to hold the enemy at bay while the commander maneuvers the main body to a position from which to assault or bypass the enemy. Additionally, the guard commander must pass on as much information about the enemy as he can deduce, so that the unit commander can make an informed decision. Too weak a guard will only cause the unit commander to commit additional forces to protect his ability to maneuver.

The guard unit that precedes the main body is called the Advance Guard. It provides for the uninterrupted advance of the main body. The advance guard usually sends forward a security element to provide warning of the enemy. This unit is called the Advance Party. The advance guard is also responsible for its own flank security. The advance party may in turn send forward a security unit called a Point, to provide early warning of enemy units. The support is the bulk of the advance guard and usually provides the flank security. (See Diagrams 1 and 2.)

The advance guard should be task organized to overcome any enemy or obstacles the enemy deploys against the unit and, within its capabilities, reduce these threats. If the enemy can not be overcome, the advance guard commander covers the maneuver of the main body and provides as much information as possible.

DIAGRAM 1 DIAGRAM 2

The Flank Guard is responsible for ensuring that the enemy does not bring direct fire to bear or have observation of the main body from its flank. Though it should not become decisively engaged, it must do what is necessary to provide the main body time to prepare for an attack into its flank. As with the advance guard, the flank guard must be task organized with sufficient assets to accomplish its mission. (See Diagram 3.)

The flank guard moves abreast of the main body on a parallel route. The flank guard may move continuously and at the same pace as the main body (Diagram 1) or it may bound between successive positions (Diagram 2). These positions should be located on key terrain that can control avenues of approach into the flank. Lastly, the flank guard split into two units on each flank, can travel in alternating bounds between key terrain features (Diagram 3). No matter which method the unit commander uses, he must keep in mind that the flank guard will probably be traveling on more difficult terrain than the main body. Because of this, it may have trouble keeping pace with the main body and must be rotated frequently.

DIAGRAM 3

To the rear of the main body is the Rear Guard. Like the advance guard, it can deploy a point (called a rear point) to provide early warning. Rapid movement forward can, in and of itself, provide a measure of security to the rear.

The security elements deployed around the main body are used to buy time for the unit commander to develop the situation before committing the main body. When contact is possible, the unit commander will probably be making contact with the enemy's security elements. However, the commander must be prepared to bump into the enemy's main forces sooner than expected.

e. Contact imminent. As the unit commander further closes with the enemy, he must once again update his expectation of enemy contact. When the commander determines that he is close to the enemy main body or has other reasons to believe that a significant enemy force represents a threat to his unit, he will update his expectation of contact to contact imminent.

At this time, the security units will most likely deploy into their combat formation and the unit as a whole will adopt an Approach March formation. The commander may partially or fully deploy his main body. Security and deployability take precedence over speed and control. The final picture may have the advance guard deployed in a wedge, while the main body either remains in a column or deploys into one of the more deployable formations.

The unit commander makes all last minute details for combat that he deems necessary. Indirect fire weapon systems are positioned to provide quick and accurate support. He further evaluates the upcoming terrain to help in making decisions on the deployment and maneuver of the main body upon contact.

In the approach march, the advance guard may now move under the protection of an overwatching unit. This is when an element moves forward while another element positions itself to support by fire in case of enemy contact. Upon contact, the supporting element fires upon the enemy in order to assist the supported unit in either assaulting the enemy, bypassing, or falling back to better terrain. If you choose to overwatch your lead elements, ensure you do not push them out farther than the supporting unit's weapons can range.

Once again, remember, movement to contact ends when your unit occupies an assembly area or attack position in order to prepare for a deliberate attack or deploys from the march formation into an assault formation to conduct a hasty attack or assume the defense.

In a movement to contact, a company can be assigned the mission of advance guard, as a part of the main body, or it can conduct an independent movement to contact. If assigned the mission of advance guard, it will provide a rifle platoon reinforced as the advance party and provide for its own flank security. If assigned the mission of an independent movement to contact, its advance guard is composed of a rifle platoon reinforced with a squad acting as advance party. The advance guard for the rifle company does not contain a support unit. The company also deploys squads to protect its flank and rear. (See Diagrams 1 and 2.)

4. **Combined Arms.** A movement to contact will employ all the assets available to the MAGTF (Marine Air Ground Task Force). Only through the integrated use of all assets available, can the commander maintain momentum and come to grips with the enemy main body.

a. Weapons company/platoon. Elements of the weapons company and weapons platoon support subordinate units in order to give them sufficient combat power to accomplish the mission. They possess sufficient combat power to overwhelm the enemy or to fix him in place so that you can maneuver your main body. All elements must be given the necessary tools to accomplish their assigned mission.

b. Fire support planning. Indirect fire support assets should be positioned well forward in order to achieve sufficient depth to influence the battle. The planning of targets is very important in ensuring timely, accurate fire support. These targets are planned on known, suspected, and likely enemy positions, and in support of the scheme of maneuver (e.g., smoke to cover crossing a potential danger area). The use of priority targets should be planned in order to make fires more responsive during movement. The underlying concept behind fire support planning is to provide the commander continuous and responsive fire support during the movement.

c. Air support. Air power is another vital element of the MAGTF. Air power can provide vital support, ranging from aerial reconnaissance to medical evacuation.

- (1) Fixed wing support (CAS) can be called in to add combat power to the unit.
- (2) Rotary wing (CAS) can be used to support the security units.
- (3) Helicopter troop lifts can be utilized to provide mobility to the main body and to transport the flank units between key terrain.
- (4) Resupply by air can help the unit commander with his logistical burden.
- (5) Medical evacuation can help save lives by providing rapid transportation to aid stations.
- (6) Command and control can be facilitated by the use of command and control helicopters.
- (7) Aerial reconnaissance can help provide information on the enemy.

As you can see, the air element of the MAGTF can provide numerous resources to help the commander conduct a successful movement to contact.

d. Engineers. Another important asset of the MAGTF is its engineers. Engineers can be attached to the advance guard in order to conduct mobility operations. The engineers would use obstacle clearing detachments (OCDs) to reduce any

obstacles and to repair roads and bridges. This is important in providing for the uninterrupted movement of the main body. The engineers could also be attached to the flank guards in order to conduct counter mobility operations. In this case, the engineers would construct obstacles and destroy bridges and roads in order to hinder the enemy's ability to attack the flank.

e. A armor and mechanized units. These types of units are utilized to make the most use of their armor protection, mobility, firepower, and shock effect. In mechanized operations, the advance guard should be task organized to conduct both mounted and dismounted operations, dependent on the situation. A well-balanced team will be necessary to deal with a wide range of contingencies. The flanks will also need sufficient mobility and firepower to maintain pace with and protect the main body. The maneuver element of the main body should also be as mobile as the assets allow. At a minimum the unit commander should have some of his armor and mechanized assets with the main body as a reserve. Antiarmor assets should also be spread out throughout the unit to provide protection.

f. Combat service support (CSS). CSS assets will need to travel with larger units in their movements to contact. The commander must ensure that he has the necessary CSS to sustain him in accomplishing the mission. These elements will usually travel with the main body, though detachments may travel with the advance guard.

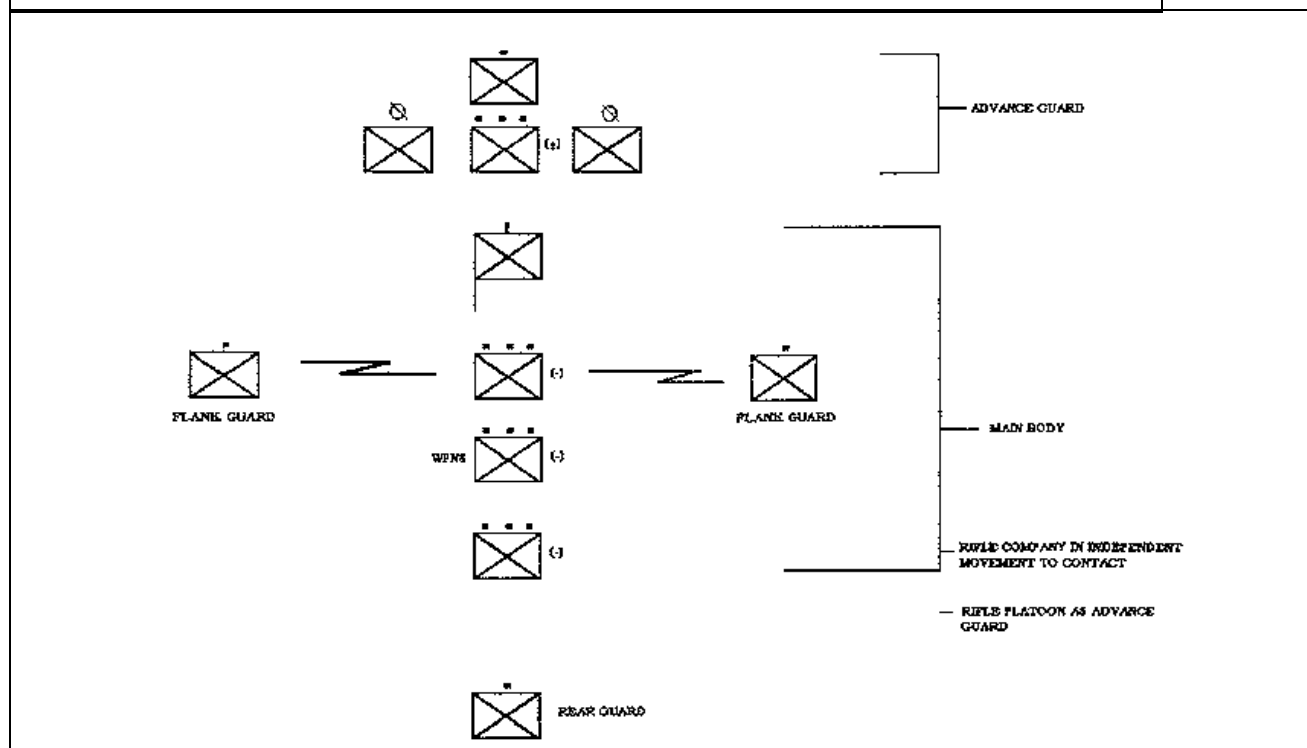
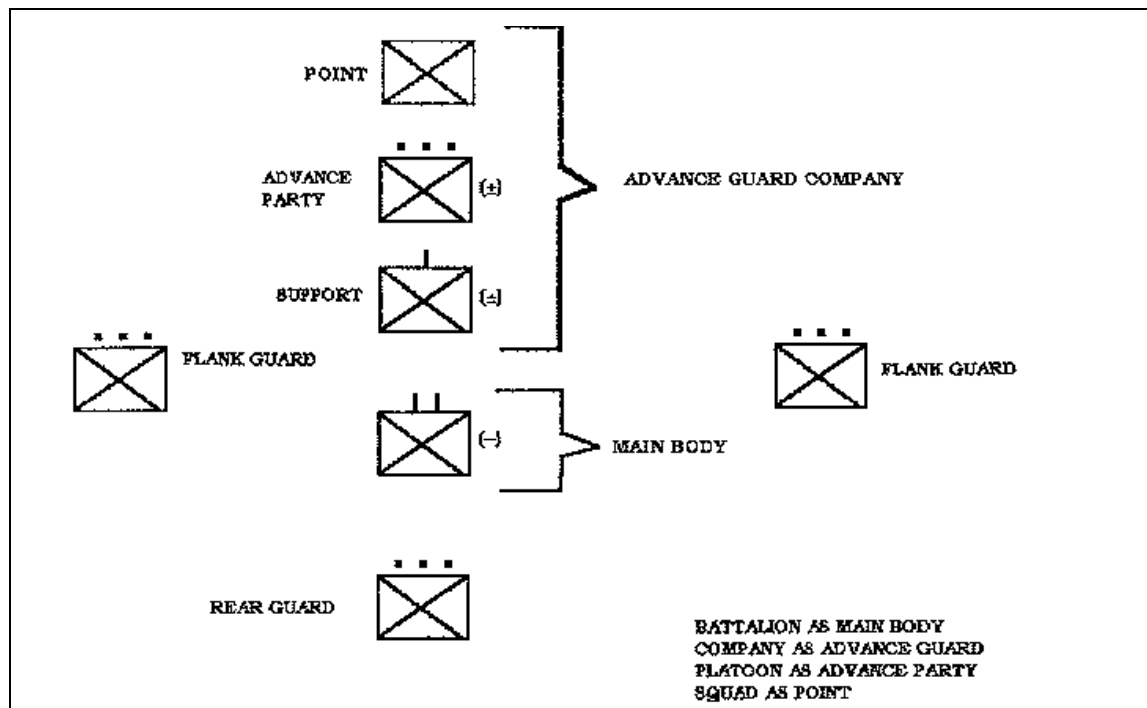
g. Motor transport. Motor transportation assets are another vital link within the MAGTF. The main body may ride in order to conserve energy for actions on contact. Additionally, the CSS assets will require transportation to carry the logistic material. Transportation adds a great deal of mobility, but must be used wisely and safeguarded.

h. Communications. Communications is a vital concern. The security elements need the ability to pass on information to the commander and receive new orders from him. With a good communications plan, the commander can quickly assess the situation, make a decision, and disseminate it before the enemy knows what is going on. Communications may be hindered because the security elements will be separated from the main body. Additionally, since ground and air units frequently operate on different frequencies, units needing to talk to aircraft must have the proper equipment and communications plan.

5. **Summary.** A movement to contact is an offensive operation where the commander moves forward into uncertainty to find the enemy. The commander must task organize their unit for flexibility to be able to maneuver freely upon contact. The unit commander tries to quickly pass through the enemy's security zone and come to grips with the main body. The key is to make contact with the minimum force necessary to fix the enemy, develop the situation, and then to maneuver the bulk of the combat power to a position from which to destroy the enemy.

To assist the commander in the decision-making process, the Marine Corps identifies three levels of expectation of enemy contact; remote, possible, and imminent. Each level has its own factors to consider. The commander chooses a formation and organizes their unit based on the need for security, retention of control over the main body, speed, and ease of deployability. The commander's estimate of the situation and mission will drive which characteristics are more vital at a given time. The main concern is to make contact with the minimum force necessary, thereby leaving the bulk of the unit free to maneuver.

The MAGTF possesses numerous assets to assist in the movement to contact. A well-balanced combined arms team will have the best chance for success.



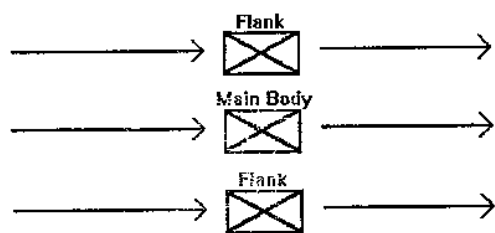


Figure 1. Flank guard traveling constantly

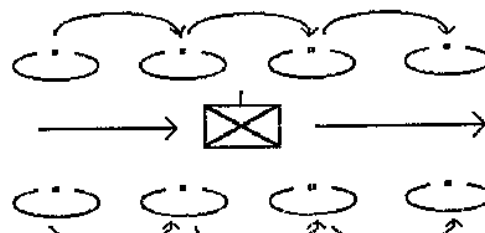


Figure 2. Flank guard moves in successive bounds

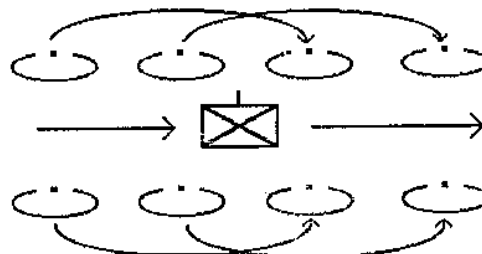


Figure 3. Flank guard moves in alternating bounds